Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NIAMEY 01124 161737Z

43
ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 PER-01 SCS-03 SCA-01

ACDA-05 SCCT-01 IO-11 PC-01 AID-05 OC-05 CCO-00 /107 W
---------- 033957
P R 161715Z MAR 76
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3150
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
WRUTALS/AMEMBASSY LAGOS 3485
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMOSSION OECD PARIS UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 1124

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, NG
SUBJ: TROUBLE IN NIGER

REF: NIAMEY 1097 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY. COUP LED BY FORMER MINISTER OF RURAL ECONOMY BAYERE MOUSSA AND TWO TOUMEG ASSOCIATES EARLY MORNING MARCH 15 CAME CLOSE TO SUCCEEDING BUT WITHIN SEVERAL HOURS REBELS WERE OVERWHELMED BY SUPERIOR FORCES LOYAL TO GOVER XENT. KOUNTCHE REMAINS FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF SITUATION BUT IN AFTERMATH OF BITTERNESS OF RELATIVELY BLOODY CONFRONTATION, HE WILL BE OPERATING FROM INCREASINGLY NARROW BASE. HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO RESORT MORE AND MORE TO AUTHORITARIAN RULE. FOR TIME BEING, US INTERESTS AND DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES NOT RPT NOT AFFECTED ONE WAY OR
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PAGE 02 NIAMEY 01124 161737Z

ANOTHER BY THESE DEVELOPMENTS. END SUMMARY.

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

2. PIECING TOGETHER VARIOUS REPORTS WE HAVE OBTAINED CONCERNING YESTERDAY'S ATTEMPTS TO OVERTHROW KOUNTCHE REGIME BY DISSIDENT MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERS, ME FOLLOWING PICTURE EMERGES:

3. LEADERS OF COUP WERE FORMER MINISTER OF RURAL ECONOMY BAYERE MOUSSA WHO WAS DISMISSED FROM GOVERNMENT AS RESULT OF DIFFERENCES WITH KOUNTCHE ON FEBRUARY 21 (SEE NIAMEY 736 AND 759), CAPTAIN SIDI MOHAMED, CHEF DE CABINET, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE AND AHMED MOUDOR, SECRETARY GENERAL OF LOCAL TRADE UNION, UNTN. COUP LEADERS APPEAR TO HAVE HAD LITTLE IN COMMON EXCEPT THEIR OPPOSITION TO KOUNTCHE AGAINST WHOM THEY ALL HARBORED PERSONAL GRUDGES.

4. COUP GOT UNDER WAY AROUND 0315 MARCH 15 WHEN FOLLOWERS OF BAYERE MOUSSA CLOSED DOWN POWER PLANT SHUTTING OFF ELECTRICITY FOR ALL OF NIAMEY. ABOUT 0530 HOURS THEY ATTACKED ARMY HEADQUARTERS LOCATED NEAR PRESIDENCY AND GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS WITHIN 100 YARDS OF PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE'S RESIDENCE. THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL IN WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN SURPRISE ATTACK AND FROM ABOUT 0600 TO 0830 BAYERE MOUSSA WAS IN CONTROL OFARMY HEADQUARTERS AND SURROUNDING AREAS. FROM THIS BASE HE ATTEMPTED TAKE KOUNTCHE PRISONER BUT FAILED. REPORTS VARY WHETHER KOUNTCHE STOOD HIS GROUND AND FOUGHT BACK OR WHETHER HE ESCAPED ELSEWHERE. REBELS ALSO GAINED CONTROL OF RADIO STATION BUT FOR REASONS UNKNOWN FAILED TO EXPLOIT THIS ASSET.

5. AROUND 0830 HOURS, FORCES LOYAL TO KOUNTCHE RALLIED, MOUNTED COUNTER ATTACK AND WIPED OUT BAYERE MOUSSA AND HIS BASE AT ARMY HEADQUARTERS. AT SAME TIME, GOVERNMENT FORCES STARTED CLEANING UP POCKETS OF REBEL RESISTANCE SCATTERED AROUND NIAMEY AND IN ARMY BARRACKS AT EDGE OF TOWN. BY 0930 HOURS GOVERNMENT HAD GAINED UPPER HAND AND AT 1015 HOURS, MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE IDRISSA AROUNA CAME ON AIR TO ANNOUNCE GOVERNMENT WAS IN CONTROL OF SITUATION (NIAMEY 1092).

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PAGE 03 NIAMEY 01124 161737Z

6. BY LOCAL STANDARDS, COUP WAS BLOODY. GON ADMITS TO DEATH OF CAPTAIN ALZOUMA SANDA, COMMANDER OF REPUBLIC GUARD, WHO LED FINAL ATTACK ON BAYERE MOUSSA'S FORCES AND SEVEN MEN. ALZOUMA INCIDENTALLY IS SURVIVED BY TWO WIVES AND FOURTEEN CHILDREN. BAYERE MOUSSA'S FORCES ARE SAID TO HAVE SUFFERED 20 - 40 CASUALTIES AND TOTAL WOUNDED ON BOTH SIDES NUMBER APPROXIMATELY 50. GON CLAIMS GGUP LEADERS

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

ARRESTED; THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS THAT SIDI MOHAMED WAS
KILLED IN FINAL ASSAULT AND BAYERE MOUSSA SEVERELY WOUNDED.

7. NOTWITHSTANDING INTENSITY OF HOSTILITIES AND
CONFUSION CHARACTERISTIC OF CONFLICT OF THIS TYPE,
WITH PARTICIPANTS UNSURE WHO WAS ON WHICH SIDE AND BRUSH
FIRES IN VARIOUS SECTIONS OF TOWN,
CONFLICT DID NOT SPILL OVER TO CIVILIANS MANY OF
WHOM WERE ACCIDENTALLY CAUGHT UP IN HOSTILITIES AS
THEY SPREAD AROUND TOWN. IN MORE CROWDED BUSINESS AREAS
PEOPLE WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS SEEMINGLY UNINTERESTED IN
FIGHTING WHICH THEY SEEMED TO REGARD AS MILITARY
GRUDGE FIGHT OF NO CONCERN TO THEM. EXCEPT FOR ONE OR
TWO CASES OF REPORTED LOOTING OF FOREIGNERS' HOUSES BY
BAYERE MOUSSA'S SUPPORTERS ON THE RUN AFTER THEIR
DEFEAT, THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS THAT FOREIGNERS WERE
MOLESTED.

8. GON HAS ADOPTED POSTURE OF BUSINESS AS USUAL AND BY AFTERNOON
MARCH 15 RADIO WAS URGING EVERYONE TO GET BACK TO WORK.
AIRPORT HAS REMAINED OPEN AND IS FUNCTIONING NORMALLY;
HOWEVER, GOVERNMENT HAS DECLARED 1930 TO 0600 CURFEW
FOR UNDERTERMINED PERIOD OF TIME.

9. COUP APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY NIAMEY-BASED
AFFAIR WITH NO EFFORT TO MOBILIZE SUPPORT ELSEWHERE
IN COUNTRY. TELEPHONE CALLS BY PC DIRECTOR TO PCV'S IN
TAHOUA, ZINDER, MARADI AND AGADEZ DEPARTMENTS
ELICITED REPLY THAT AL IS CALM.

10. COMMENT: KOUNTCHE HAS WON ANOTHER ROUND AND
ONCE AGAIN APPEARS TO BE FIRMLY IN CONTROLBUT NO ONE
HAS GAINED ANYTHING BY THIS DEVELOPMENT. LATEST EVENTS
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PAGE 04 NIAMEY 01124 161737Z

COMING ON TOP OF EARLIER ARRESTS OF FORMER MILITARY
ASSOCIATES WHO HAD JOINED HIM IN APRIL 1974 COUP AND
SEVERAL CABINET SHAKEUPS FURTHER ERODE POSITION
KOUNTCHE HAS SOUGHT PROJECT AS NATIONAL LEADER OF STABLE
GOVERNMENT. COUP INVOLVING ON REBEL SIDE ONE HAUSA
AND TWO TRAREG LEADERS AGAINST PREDOMINANTLY

DJERMA GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO BROUGHT OUT INTO OPEN ISSUE
OF TRIBAL TENSIONS WHICH HAD SO FAR BEEN LARGELY DORMANT.
BLOOD THAT HAS BEEN SPILLED CAN ONLY CREATE NEW DIVISIONS
WITHIN MHRNJRY. KOUNTCHE CAN BE EXPECTED TO BECOME
INCREASING SUSPICIOUS, SERIOUS AND ARBITRARY LEADING TO FURTHER NA
RROWING OF HIS BASE.

10. IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE, THESE EVENTS SHOULD HAVE

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

LITTLE EFFECT ON US ACTIVITIES IN NIGER. GON WILL BE MAKING
EXTRA EFFORT TO GET ON WITH ITS CURRENT BUSINESS INCLUDING
DEALING WITH FOOD SITUATION. REST OF COUNTRY WAS LARGELY
UNTOUCHED BY COUP.HECK

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

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